

Integrated non-formal education and training programs and centre linkages for adult employment in South Africa

Celestin Mayombe

University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

This article outlines the results of a qualitative study, which investigated the adult non-formal education and training (NFET) centre linkages with external role-players in providing post-training support for the employment of graduates. The concern that informed this article is that adults who face long-term unemployment remain unemployed after completing the NFET programs in South Africa. The article reports on an empirical study conducted to investigate what constitutes NFET enabling environments for employment. The findings reveal that managers did not create adequate linkages that could enable graduates to access needed post-training support, community resources, public goods and services. The author concludes that without linking the NFET programs to external stakeholders, graduates will continue to find it difficult to be employed or to start small businesses which perpetuates unemployment and chronic poverty in South Africa.

Keywords: *Non-formal education, adult training, employment, centre linkages, South Africa*

Introduction

The central discussion about the provision of adult non-formal education and training (NFET) today is the question: Is training for purposes of merely obtaining a certificate or it training for obtaining employment? Adult NFET has become a significant developmental agenda after the World Education Forum convened in April 2000, had approved the Dakar Framework for Action to the achievement of Education for All (EFA). Governments, organisations, agencies and associations represented at the World Education Forum had to implement six main goals of EFA (UNESCO, 2011). The focus of this article relates to goal three which deals with the learning needs of the youth and adults. The World Education Forum stressed the importance of “ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs” (UNESCO, 2011:4).

The EFA’s third goal lays a ground for providing skills training to all youth and adults in order to integrate into the labour market. In order to achieve this goal three of the Dakar Framework for Action, King (2011) argues that there is a need to develop occupational skills and knowledge, and create enabling factors to ensure that these are utilised to generate income. Previous studies on adult education and training for employment focused only on the contribution of adult non-formal training in reducing poverty among disadvantaged communities. They reveal details on the learning conditions for non-formal (Kyndt, Dochy and Nijs, 2009); job-related non-formal education and training (Kaufmann, 2015); and on training delivery methods (Islam, Mia and Sorcar, 2012; Blaak, Openjuru and Zeelen, 2012). Morton and Montgomery (2011) note that trainees experience difficulty in finding employment in the formal and informal sectors. Furthermore, trainees do not have access to resources to start their own businesses (Akpama, Esang, Asor and Osang, 2011).

A little is known about the link between NFET programs and employment of the graduates. The present study investigated NFET centres that offer skills training programs to adults in order to empower them to take up wage or self-employment in the fields of agriculture, industry, services and small business activities. The main objective

of this article is to investigate the extent to which the centres have established effective links with institutions to foster the utilisation of acquired skills in paid or self-employment of graduates. The following secondary objectives are identified:

- To examine the training delivery approach at NFET centres.
- To investigate the extent to which a centre has established linkages with institutions to foster graduates' employment.

In South Africa, the provision of livelihood skills under NFET programs aims at increasing employment opportunities for adults and to improve social inclusion (Aitchison, 2007). To this end, the South African government legislated non-formal adult education and training through the Adult Education and Training (AET) Act 25 of 2010 in order to reduce poverty due to unemployment among non-educated and unskilled adults. NFET targets those adults who have no access to formal vocational training systems at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges (Department of Higher Education and Training ([DHET], 2012). Central to Act 25 of 2010 is the objective to increase the capacity of unskilled adults to produce goods and services; that is, to generate income. To reach this objective, the Act specifies that NFET centres, in collaboration with government departments, private institutions and various stakeholders should create conducive factors (enabling environments) for the skills utilisation in the labour market (RSA, 2010).

In this article, enabling environments to refer to internal and external factors of the NFET centre which create conducive conditions for skills acquisition and skills utilisation in wage or self-employment (King and Palmer, 2006; World Bank, 2004). The article begins with the theoretical framework guiding the study. Next, the focus is on the study's context and methodology. The presentation of the findings is followed by a discussion of the findings. Finally, conclusions and recommendations in form of an integrated framework of NFET for employment are presented.

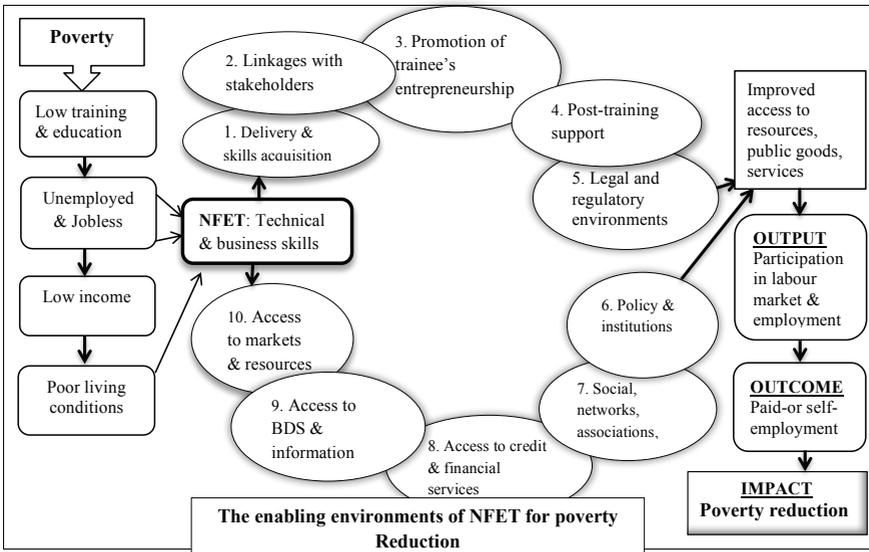
Theoretical framework for enabling environments of adult NFET centres

Scholars and practitioners argue the provision of adult NFET programs

should mainly focus on wage and self-employment rather than a certificate. On one side of the coin, a certificate is important because it is a testimonial of a certain knowledge and skills acquisition. On the other, training alone is no longer a guarantee for a job (Langer, 2013; Pantea, 2015). The essence of the latter view is that adults do not need a certificate for prestige, rather a sustainable job to support their families. Islam, et al. (2012) and King (2012) are of the view that if the environments of NFET are conducive, in some cases, adults with skills can secure a sustainable job without a certificate.

In general, the theoretical framework below is based on the proposition that if adult trainees acquire both technical and business skills from NFET centres if there are enabling environments for them to access to community assets, goods and services, graduates will become self-employed in businesses or employed in the formal or informal sectors.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the study



Source: adapted from International Labour Organization (2007: 7)

For NFET programs to achieve employment outcomes, there is a need for an enabling environment. Palmer (2007), Palmer, Wedgwood and Hayman (2007) note that the existence of enabling factors will foster the

skills acquired through NFET centres to contribute to the employment of a target group. The reason is that an enabling environment allows skills to be utilised effectively. In the same vein, Adams (2007) argues that skills acquired from NFET alone are unlikely to address the problems of unemployment or meeting all the needs of poor adults. Furthermore, King (2012) points out that skills acquisition is very different from skills utilisation for employment, and especially for the poorest who can only access low-skills training of very low quality. Therefore, without enabling environments, NFET programs may only lead to educational achievement that has to be valued for its own benefits apart from those of immediate employment. Adult NFET programs need enabling environments in order to reduce unemployment and poverty.

Education in general and skills training for poor adults, in particular, cannot on its own achieve the desired outcomes without supportive conditions in place. As seen in Figure 1 above (framework of the study), there is no automatic connection between adult skills training and employment. In line with the argument of King (2012) and Pantea (2016), NFET alone, as a strategy of unemployment reduction is not enough. It does not create employment, nor does it guarantee income-generating activities for graduates. Therefore, for skills acquired from NFET programs to translate into employment and poverty reduction, there is a need for other factors, internal and external to the NFET system. Dunkley (2008) and White and Kenyon (2005) note that among the significant factors external to the adult centres that foster the utilisation of skills in employment are: the linkages with public institutions and associations, the social networks and post-training support programs.

Institutional linkages of the centre with public and private sectors

Adult NFET programs do not operate in a vacuum, but in a given community with social and economic environments. One would agree with Freedman (2008) and the World Bank (2005) that a quality NFET program is aware of the resources and needs of the community in which it is located. It establishes and maintains links with various referral sources and community agencies as well as other relevant educational programs and organisations. It regularly reviews its community, sectoral and organisational relationships. According to Freedman (2008), the

collaboration should be between the NFET centre and the agencies at local and national levels, and keen involvement of social partners. This debate implies that there should be a relation between institutional linkages of the centre and the provision of post-training support. Freedman (2008) further argues that the more a centre is formally or informally linked to external role-players, the more likely its graduates may receive support for employment.

Providing post-training support for wage and self-employment

The provision of skills training to adult is only one package of an employment promotion strategy. Dunkley (2008) is of view that adult skills training might have limited effectiveness unless other supporting mechanisms are in place in order to enhance skills utilisation in the employment of graduates. So, graduates need support from both the centre and other stakeholders in the public and private sectors. Effective entry into employment and establishment of a micro-enterprise requires much more than providing skills training. One can agree with King and Palmer (2007:51) that adult skills training programs without post-training support lead to the creation of 'half-baked' skills gaining.

The types of post-training support depend on wage or self-employment opportunities available in the community. Dunkley (2008) argues that the post-training support for graduates who are interested in wage employment comprises linking them with employers for job placement, the arrangement of opportunities in order to gain work experience and the preparation of a list of prospective employers. The post-training support for those graduates interested in self-employment entails the service to start small business; accessing credit, suitable premises for production purposes, equipment and tools, marketing support, support for the formation of groups or forming enterprises/co-operatives, follow-up advisory services or technical assistance; support to access business development services and financial assistance (Dunkley, 2008; Hasanov, Biybosunova and Hasanova, 2009; White and Kenyon, 2005). The support will help overcome the disabling factors outside of the NFET system at all levels (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2011).

Study context and methodology

In South Africa, the province of KwaZulu-Natal, the Department of

Education provides two significant categories of NFET programs for adults who have no or little formal education. The first type is the formal educational system linked to the National Qualification Framework (NQF) structure and Adult Education and Training (AET), which facilitates the adult learner's progression from AET level 1 to level 4. Level 4 concludes in a General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) at the end of the programs (KZN-DoE, 2011). The first type of program covers AET levels 1-3, which is equal to high school, also known as "second-chance" schooling. It provides "an educational level equivalent to the Adult Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults". (KZN-DoE, 2011: 36).

The second type is AET level 4, which is linked to livelihood skills. It is this category of NFET program, which is relevant to the focus of this study. It encompasses training unemployed adults from rural and urban backgrounds in technical and entrepreneurial skills to enable them to take up paid or self-employment in the fields of agriculture, services or small business activities (KZN-DoE, 2012). Both government and NGO-based NFET centres in this type of adult education and training provide technical and entrepreneurial skills for impoverished adults to enable them to take up self-employment or wage-employment in urban and rural areas.

Research methodology

The research design was in the form of multiple case studies, which is an approach in which a particular instance or a few carefully selected cases are studied intensively (Gilbert, 2008; Rule and John, 2011). The main reason behind choosing the multiple-case study design is that it helps make a comparison across NFET centres, and its nature of analytical detail and inductive logic (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). Cases in this study also included document analysis and some observations of activities that were written up. The sample was drawn from the education districts of Umlazi, Pinetown, ILembe and uMgungundlovu (Msunduzi) in the KZN province. The sample consisted of centre managers and trainers from both urban and rural settings from public centres managed by the provincial department of education and private centres managed by non-profit organisations (NPOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). However, the study also utilised questionnaires in the

quantitative method as a supplement to the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews.

The qualitative method was beneficial to the study because it helped present the data from the perspective of the respondents on the enabling environments being studied (Creswell, 2009). In the context of non-probability sampling, from the 21 centres, a sample of five managers and 10 trainers (each centre with two trainers) was selected for one-on-one interviews. The study used the purposive sampling method (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The sample selection was based on whether NFET centres managed to make provision for at least one of the following additional criteria: Post-training follow-up and support programs for paid or self-employment; linkages with public institutions and agencies or private sectors; linkages with social networks, associations and employers and mentorship for self-employed trainees.

Document analysis and field observation and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection in this qualitative study (Creswell 2013) and data were analysed through thematic analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2012; Fouché and Bartley, 2011). With regard to document analysis, for the purpose of the analysis, the researcher reviewed the documents regarding the training program of the NFET centres under investigation. These included the training proposal, NFET manuals, annual reports, and NFET program implementation, monitoring and evaluation documents (Bryman, 2008; Nieuwenhuis, 2012). From a descriptive content analysis point of view, the researcher identified information linked to variables such as training objectives, training design and implementation, and post-training support for employment. With regard to comparative content analysis, the information from documents was compared with empirical data collected from adult trainees and centre managers. The comparative content analysis developed the understanding of the link between adult NFET and employment, for it helped thoroughly to assess the centre's enabling environments.

The researcher used the field observation to determine the extent to which the training delivery environments of the NFET centres contribute to skills acquisition. The checklist consisted of the centre's material resources such as the training venue, the convenience and condition of utilities, and plant equipment. Then the data were

compared to documents, field observation and with responses from semi-structured interview schedules. The interviews were aimed at developing a better understanding of how managers and trainers view the effectiveness of the skills training delivery environments and the external environment in fostering links for skills utilisation in wage or self-employment. The data were coded, then sorted and classified to find common themes.

Findings

The examination of the centres was based on assessing the aspect of co-operation between an adult training centre and various partners in order to provide opportunities for trainees to acquire skills and to access post-training support outside the centre. The article looks at how a centre uses the institutional linkages to foster the utilisation of acquired skills in the labour market (wage or self-employment). There are differences between public and private centres. Public adult centres are governed and financially supported by the provincial Department of Education. They rely on the Department of Education in terms of trainers' salaries, financing, materials, labour and technical assistance. Field observations indicated that skills training programs in the public centres serve a dual purpose: Self-employment for older trainees and a national certificate for youth to allow them to gain access to Further Education and Training (FET) colleges in South Africa. By contrast, the provision of skills training programs in most private centres the main focus is on self-employment. Private centres were supported by occasional national and foreign donations. Hence, the skills training approach is tailored towards immediate self-employment after graduation. It was observed that their skills training programs were often linked to income-generating activities for poor and marginalised adults.

Adult training centre A: Public centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: Skills training programs at centre A started in 2012 after its establishment by the KZN-Department of Education. Document analysis and interviews with the centre manager revealed that the focus of the skills training program is on both self-employment and wage-employment. "It also caters for trainees desiring to pursue their training at Further Education and Training (FET) colleges," (centre manager, interview). The centre has been offering

training courses in travel and tourism, ancillary health care and sewing. The duration of the skills training program is for one year (AET level-4). The programs are basically designed as a pre-employment training in both formal and informal sectors. However, the centre manager reported that the centre has financial challenges to continue implementing the skills training programs. “To sustain the program, the centre manager and trainers have to contribute from their own personal funds for the purchase and maintenance of the training materials” (centre manager, interview).

Training delivery approach: Field observations revealed that the approach of teaching and learning is subject-based, teacher-centred, has a more rigid arrangement of time table and the centre calendar followed a formal system of the National Department of Education. The program content has a variety of theoretical and practical activities done in classrooms; more attention is given to technical theory, but little to business skills. For the ancillary health care course, trainees are used to going to clinics to do some practical work. “For instance, they test people with diabetes, check their sugar levels; help people who have diseases such as HIV/Aids, and TB by caring for them and making them aware of how they can live with diseases” (centre manager, interview).

Effective links with institutions: The centre had a very limited collaboration with the local municipality which once donated some training equipment. “The municipal officials sometimes came to the centre to provide business skills training related to the sewing trade” (centre manager, interview). The training entailed small business management and entrepreneurship skills. They also taught trainees how to open a business account, and to register a small business so that they might be able to apply for a bank loan when the business would be viable in terms of criteria of the bank. Findings from interview revealed that the centre had no other links with external role-players such as public institutions, NGOs, business enterprises, employers and other local partners in fostering skills utilisation in wage or self-employment.

Post-training support for employment: There is no mechanism that the centre utilises to assist a graduate with finding wage-employment. Similarly, the time constraint made it difficult to assist a graduate with establishing a micro-enterprise or co-operative. During an

interview the centre manager pointed out that:

We do not have enough time to teach trainees how to form a co-operative. We rarely receive officials from the municipality to train them, but our adult trainees do not have enough time to learn business skills which can help them start a micro-enterprise or co-operative. They are more interested in wage-employment. The other problem we have is that our trainees only have theoretical and basic knowledge on how to start a small business or a co-operative, but not in a practical way.

This statement is an indication that the internal training delivery environments were not facilitating post-training support for wage- and self-employment. According to the centre manager, the challenges in human and material resources are hindrances to establish a mechanism in order to assist a graduate with finding wage-employment. Likewise, the training delivery environment was not conducive for the centre to assist a graduate with establishing a micro-enterprise or co-operative. There are some lessons learnt from this case study. Firstly, the connection between skills training delivery and support activities was not planned at the design stage. Secondly, the skills training was delivered on a “once-off basis”; not provided on a continuous basis.

Adult training centre B: NGO centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: This NFET centre provides training program related to self-employment. It provides training courses in agricultural technology, SMMEs and co-operatives. The manager and trainers mentioned in the interviews that the overall goal is to promote and develop entrepreneurs for sustainable small businesses at the same time. The centre trains adults who are already involved in small businesses and co-operatives; as well as potential entrepreneurs with a business idea.

Training delivery approach: The training courses begin with training need assessment sessions. The sessions help to recruit suitable trainees by identifying what type of small business he/she is interested in. The centre informs the trainees well about the skills training and the outcomes of the program. As soon as a trainee or a group of trainees decide to establish a small business or a co-operative, they undergo

further training programs. The manager stated that “We start a training program which produces an entrepreneur who can work independently. The training is a process which starts from a lower to higher stage in business.”

Effective links with institutions: The centre has linkages with public institutions and agencies and associations. The links from the private sector involve micro-finance institutions such as ABSA Bank, Ithala Bank, Capitec Bank, NGOs and local businesses. As part of entrepreneurial training, the centre train in how to articulate a business plan and present it to possible funders (centre manager, interview). Every trainee is given an opportunity to orally present his/her business plan in a workshop attended by various delegates from the micro-finance institutions.

As post-training support mechanism, the centre uses stakeholders to facilitate the transition from training to self-employment in micro-enterprises. An interview with the manager, field observations and document analysis revealed that the centre has engaged in important networks with credible organisations active in informal micro-enterprises. Stakeholders are consulted at the planning stages and are involved throughout the whole process of the training. The centre plan and provides post-training support in micro-credit and technical assistance in order to sustain graduates’ small business.

Adult training centre C: Community-based organisation centre in urban area

Program profile of the centre: The centre was established in 1992, and intended to meet the skills training needs of the poor and to empower the disadvantaged. The skills training within the centre is part of empowerment programs which entail providing non-formal vocational skills and low-skill jobs. Interviews with the manager and trainers revealed that the training programs aim at training young entrepreneurs in order to start up and grow sustainable businesses.

Training delivery approach: Interview with manager and document analysis reveal that the centre implements an inclusive Competency-Based Training package from the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) to ensure that objectives are attained.

The training course in fashion design and sewing is an SAQA accredited without certification. Trainees are taught technical and business skills at the same time. According to the manager and trainers, business training is still informal which means it is not well-integrated as it should be. At the end of the training, trainees were able to write a business plan and implement marketing strategies for their small businesses.

Effective links with institutions: The centre operates in informal partnership with the Chamber of Business and other NGOs in the community and the business support centres (centre manager, interview). It sometimes receives officials from Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA), and ABSA bank and also has a link with prospective employers. Furthermore, the centre established an informal partnership with Standard Bank and ABSA Bank for granting small business loans. For the post-training support in self-employment, the centre refers graduates to the external partners mentioned above (centre manager, interview).

A remarkable element of this case study is that the training approach is learner-centred. Like other private centres, the observations revealed that approaches such as workshops, on-the-job training and project-based training are used. Trainees were earning an income while being in training. It was observed that training delivery is characterised by three main approaches namely, 'learning by doing, learning by producing and learning by earning' in the workshops.

Types of wage-employment of trainees by centre areas

The types of the labour market where the graduates from NFET are likely to be employed according to the geographical areas are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *Distribution of types of wage-employment of trainees by centre areas (n=181)*

Type of wage-employment	Urban (n=39)		Peri-urban (n=90)		Rural (n=51)		Total sample (n=181)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Working for someone in small business area	11	28.2	17	18.88	3	5.88	31	17.12
Working for someone in small service areas/ small enterprise	11	28.2	13	14.44	5	9.8	29	16.02
Working in big business area	-	-	17	18.88	1	1.96	18	9.94
Working in big services area	1	2.56	6	6.66	1	1.96	9	4.97
Working for government/ public sector	6	15.38	14	15.55	21	41.17	41	22.65
Working for community-based organisation	10	25.64	23	25.55	20	39.21	53	29.28

Note: % within centre areas

Table 1 indicates that in the urban areas, only a few trainees (28.2%, 11/39) started working for someone in a small business or in small service areas (small enterprises). The chance of working for the government/public sector was very low (15.38%, 6/39). The probability of finding jobs in the peri-urban areas was very low, and only 25.55% (23/90) could be employed in community-based organisations. However, wage-employment chances increased in the rural areas for those who studied ancillary health care. Less than half (41.17%, 21/51) of trainees started working for the Department of Social Development, and 39.21% (20/51) respondents found jobs in community-based

organisations. According to all managers in the rural areas, the reason for this increase of wage-employment was the insufficiency of social service delivery in the rural areas.

Discussing the case studies

Adult training centre B and C demonstrate that a combination of technical skills with business skills in most centres is an effective training delivery approach that prepared most of the trainees for low-skilled wage or self-employment. The training approach is based on the principle of 'learning by doing, learning by producing and learning by earning'. The training approach of combining technical skills with business skills in a real work environment or as simulated activities as part of adult skills training, is a significant component of all initiatives to prepare trainees for the world of work in small businesses or co-operatives (Kyndt, et al., 2009; Georgiadou, et al., 2009, Kaufmann, 2015). These findings are similar to those of Islam and Mia (2007) in the NFET study in Bangladesh and Blaak, et al.'s (2012:93) study in Uganda. In these two studies, the training delivery approach for skills training acquisition was directed at producing services, goods and marketing of the products. Similarly, the practice of the skills also allowed trainees to earn some income during the training period.

Centre B and C have informal linkages with public institutions and agencies or private sectors without a signed partnership and a memorandum of understanding. Though the linkages and networks with other external role-players were not formalised, to some extent, they help in assisting graduates to start micro-enterprises or co-operatives. The findings are congruent with the argument that stakeholders tend to support adult training programs that they have been involved in during the designing and implementing phases (Georgiadou, et al., 2009; ILO, 2009).

The findings highlight the need for involving key stakeholders from the communities at the planning stage of the training. The commitment and buy-in of stakeholders would facilitate an enabling environment for the success of the training programs. Weyer (2009) and Kyndt, et al. (2009) are of the view that for the NFET programs to have external support, the centre managers should consult public, private agencies and local

leaders from the planning stage of the training. Similarly, Langer (2013) and Pantea (2016) also argue that non-formal training programs are most effective when centre managers carefully assess training needs together with other stakeholders within the community. The present findings imply that most of the managers did not visit the private sector operators in order to find out whether they might be interested in providing post-training support for wage or self-employment.

The weak institutional linkages can be explained by the failure of the training managers to persuade stakeholders interested in developing micro-entrepreneurs. As noted elsewhere, the findings reveal that most of the managers did not visit private sector operators in order to find out whether they might be interested in taking graduates (DVV International, 2011; Weyer, 2009). However, these findings are in contrast with the Integrated Women's Empowerment Program (IWEP) in Ethiopia, where training centres work in partnership with microfinance institutions (Belete, 2011). Although graduates were previously unemployed prior to the training, this partnership was effective in accessing business loans. Belete (2011) reports that there were supporting mechanisms in place and services to enable access to start-up capital.

Conclusions and recommendations

The training delivery approach, which consisted of a combination of technical and entrepreneurial skills, was relevant in responding to the needs and objectives of adult trainees. It was trainee-centred and directly intended to solve a trainee's problem of unemployment. However, the centre managers did not create adequate linkages that could enable graduates to access needed post-training support, community resources, public goods and services. The managers do not consider the significance of institutional linkages and the fact that the trainees have faced long-term unemployment which then further decreases the probability of employment.

The author concludes that the NFET centres did not create effective centre linkages for the employment of the graduates. The weak institutional linkages resulted in graduates not having adequate access to community assets, goods and services. Without linking the NFET programs to stakeholders providing post-training support, graduates

will continue finding it difficult to be employed or to start small businesses which perpetuates unemployment and chronic poverty in South Africa.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the author suggests four recommendations forming an integrated framework of NFET for employment. They could assist in improving the disabling factors in various adult training contexts in contributing to the coordinated efforts for wage and/or self-employment capacity of graduates. Firstly, centre managers should consult public, private agencies and local leaders from the planning stage of the training programs. Secondly, centre managers in partnership with stakeholders should identify potential labour markets, goods, services and income-generating opportunities for the trainees. Thirdly, centre managers should ensure that training delivery approaches the match with the employment opportunities and available income-generating activities. Fourthly, centre managers should put great effort into post-training environments and have an employment co-ordinator who will maintain contact with partners and graduates.

Limitations of the study

The research design was in the form of a selective qualitative study using small samples of NFET centres as case studies. However, the findings could apply to NFET centres in other contexts for making the adult non-formal training programs market and demand oriented. The study was limited to adult centres in South Africa and did not include centres from other countries in Africa or other continents.

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About the Author

Celestin Mayombe completed his Ph.D. studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, focusing on Adult Education and Training for poverty reduction, and has worked as an assistant lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is also active in community engagement and conducts research among those community members who have difficulties in generating incomes to become self-sufficient in order to enjoy a reasonable quality of life. He is a research fellow at South African Research Chair Initiative (SARChI) in Applied Poverty Reduction Assessment administered at the School of Built Environment and Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Contact details

Celestin Mayombe
School of Built Environment and Development Studies
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban, 4041, South Africa

Email: celestin-may@hotmail.com